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THE HUMAN TRAGEDY

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BY ANATOLE FRANCE

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WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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TO

J. H. ROSNY

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FRA GIOVANNI

Πᾶς δ' ὀδυνηρὸς βίος ἀνθρώπων,
κοὐκ ἔστι πόνων ἀνάπαυσις.
ἄλλο τι τοῦ ζῆν φίλτερον, ἀλλ' ὅ
σκότος ἀμπίσχων κρύπτει νεφέλαις.
(Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 190 sqq.)[1]

I

FRA GIOVANNI

IN those days the holy man, who, born though he was of human parents, was veritably a son of God, and who had chosen for his bride a maiden that folk open the door to as reluctantly as to Death itself, and never with a smile,—the poor man of Jesus Christ, St. Francis, was gone up to the Skies. Earth, which he had perfumed with his virtues, kept only his body and the fruitful seed of his words. His sons in the spirit grew meantime, and multiplied among the Peoples, for the blessing of Abraham was upon them.

[1] 'All the life of man is full of pain, and there is no surcease of sorrow. If there be aught better elsewhere than this present life, it is hid shrouded in the clouds of darkness.'

Kings and Queens girded on the cord of St. Francis, the poor man of Jesus Christ. Men in multitudes sought in forgetfulness of self and of the world the secret of true happiness; and flying the joy of life, found a greater joy. The Order of St. Francis spread fast through all Christendom, and the Houses of the Poor Men of the Lord covered the face of Italy, Spain, the two Gauls and the Teutonic lands. In the good town of Viterbo arose a House of peculiar sanctity. In it Fra Giovanni took the vows of Poverty, and lived humble and despised, his soul a garden of flowers fenced about with walls.

He had knowledge by revelation of many truths that escape clever and world-wise men. And ignorant and simple-minded as he was, he knew things unknown to the most learned Doctors of the age.

He knew that the cares of riches make men ill-conditioned and wretched, and that coming into the world poor and naked, they would be happy, if only they would live as they were born.

He was poor and merry-hearted. His delight was in obedience; and renouncing the making

of plans of any sort for the future, he relished the bread of the heart. For the weight of human actions is a heavy load, and we are trees bearing poisoned fruit. He was afraid to act, for is not all effort painful and useless? He was afraid to think, for thought is evil.

He was very humble, knowing how men have nothing of their own that they should boast of, and that pride hardens the heart. He knew, moreover, that they who possess for all wealth only the riches of the spirit, if they make boast of their treasure, so far lower themselves to the level of the great ones of the earth.

And Fra Giovanni outdid in humility all the Monks of the House of Viterbo. The Superior of the Monastery, the holy Brother Silvester, was less righteous than he, forasmuch as the master is less righteous than the servant, the mother less innocent than the babe.

Observing that Fra Giovanni had a way of stripping himself of his gown to clothe the suffering members of Jesus Christ, the Superior forbade him, in the name of holy obedience, to give away his garments to the poor. Now the same day this command was laid on him, Giovanni went, as his wont was, to pray in the

woods that cover the slopes of Monte Cunino. It was Winter time; snow was falling, and the wolves coming down into the villages.

Fra Giovanni kneeling down at the foot of an oak, spoke to God, as might one friend to another, and besought Him to take pity on all orphans, prisoners and captives, to take pity on the master of the fields sorely harried by the Lombard usurers, to take pity on the stags and hinds of the forest chased by the hunters, and on all trapped creatures, whether of fur or feathers. And lo! he was rapt away in an ecstasy, and saw a hand pointing in the sky.

When presently the sun had slipped behind the mountains, the man of God arose from his knees and took the path to the Monastery. On the white, silent road thither, he met a beggar, who asked him an alms for the love of God.

'Alas!' he told him, 'I have nothing but my gown, and the Superior has forbidden me to cut it in two so as to give away the half. Therefore I cannot divide it with you. But if you love me, my son, you will take it off me whole and undivided.'

On hearing these words, the beggar promptly stripped the Friar of his gown.

So Fra Giovanni went on his way naked under the falling snow, and entered the city. As he was crossing the Piazza with nothing on but a linen cloth about his loins, the children who were running at play in the Great Square made mock at him. In derision, they shook their fists in his face with the thumb stuck between the first and middle fingers, and threw snow at him mixed with mud and small stones.

Now there lay in the Great Square some logs of timber for the woodwork of a house, and one of the logs happened to be balanced across another. Two children ran and took their places, one at each end of the beam, and began playing see-saw—two of the same children who had made mock of the holy man and thrown stones at him.

He went up to them now smiling, and said:

'Dear little children, will you suffer me to share your game?'

And sitting down on one end of the beam, he see-sawed up and down against the two little ones. And some of the citizens happening to pass that way, said, wondering:

'Truly and indeed the man is out of his wits.'

But after the bells had rung the *Ave Maria*,

Fra Giovanni was still at see-saw. And it chanced that certain Priests from Rome, who had come to Viterbo to visit the Mendicant Friars, whose fame was great through the world, just then crossed the Great Square. And hearing the children shouting, 'Look! little Brother Giovanni's here,' the Priests drew near the Monk, and saluted him very respectfully. But the holy man never returned their salute, but making as though he did not see them, went on see-sawing on the swaying beam. So the Priests said to each other:

'Come away; the fellow is a mere dunce and dullard!'

Then was Fra Giovanni glad, and his heart overflowed with joy. For these things he did out of humility and for the love of God. And he put his joy in the scorn of men, as the miser shuts his gold in a cedarn chest, locked with a triple lock.

At nightfall he knocked at the Monastery door, and being admitted, appeared among the Brethren naked, bleeding, and covered with mire. He smiled and said:

'A kind thief took my gown, and some children deemed me worthy to play with them.'

But the Brothers were angry, because he had dared to pass through the city in so undignified a plight.

'He feels no compunction,' they declared, 'about exposing the Holy Order of St. Francis to derision and disgrace. He deserves the most exemplary punishment.'

The General of the Order, being warned a great scandal was ruining the sacred Society, called together all the Brethren of the Chapter, and made Fra Giovanni kneel humbly on his knees in the midst of them all. Then, his face blazing with anger, he chid him harshly in a loud, rough voice. This done, he consulted the assembly as to the penance it was meet to impose on the guilty Brother.

Some were for having him put in prison or suspended in an iron cage from the Church steeple, while others advised he should be chained up for a madman.

And Fra Giovanni, beaming with satisfaction, told them:

'You are very right, my brethren; I deserve these punishments, and worse ones still. I am good for nothing but foolishly to waste and squander the goods of God and of my Order.'

And Brother Marcian, who was a man of great sternness both of life and doctrine, cried:

'Hear him! he talks like a hypocrite; that honeyed voice of his issues from a whited sepulchre.'

And Fra Giovanni said again:

'Brother Marcian, I am indeed capable of every infamy—but for God's good help.'

Meantime the General was pondering over the strange behaviour of Fra Giovanni, and he besought the Holy Spirit to inspire the judgment he was to give. And lo! as he prayed, his anger was changed into admiration. He had known St. Francis in the days when that Angel of Heaven, born of a woman, was a sojourner in this world, and the ensample of the favourite follower of Christ had taught him the love of spiritual perfection.

So his soul was enlightened, and he recognized in the works of Fra Giovanni a divine innocency and beauty.

'My brethren,' he said at length, 'far from blaming our Brother, let us admire the grace he receives so abundantly from God. In very truth he is a better man than we. What he has done, he has done in imitation of Jesus

Christ, who "suffered the little children to come unto Him," and let the Roman soldiers strip Him of His garments.'

Then he thus addressed the kneeling Fra Giovanni:

'This, Brother, is the penance I lay upon you. In the name of that holy obedience you owe St. Francis, I command you go forth into the country, and the first beggar you meet, beg him to strip you of your tunic. Then, when he has left you naked, you must come back into the city, and play in the Public Square with the little children.'

Having so said, the General of the Order came down from his chair of state, and, raising Fra Giovanni from the ground, fell on his own knees before him and kissed his feet. Then, turning to the assembled Monks, he said to them:

'In very truth, my Brethren, this man is the good God's plaything.'

THE LAMP

II

THE LAMP

IN those days the truth was revealed to Fra Giovanni that the riches of this world come from God and should be the heritage of the poor, who are the favourite children of Jesus Christ.

Christian folk were busy celebrating the Saviour's birth; and Fra Giovanni had come to the town of Assisi, which is set upon a mountain-top, and from this mountain first rose the Sun of Charity.

Now the day before Christmas eve, Fra Giovanni was kneeling in prayer before the Altar under which St. Francis sleeps in a stone coffin. And he was meditating, dreaming how St. Francis was born in a stable, like Jesus. And while he was pondering, the Sacristan came up to him and asked him of his goodness to look after the Church while he ate his supper. Church and Altar were both loaded with pre-

cious ornaments; gold and silver were there in abundance, for the sons of St. Francis had long fallen from their early poverty, and had received gifts from the Queens of the Earth.

Fra Giovanni assured the Sacristan:

'Go, Brother, and enjoy your meal. I will guard the Church, as Our Lord would have it guarded.'

And so saying, he went on with his meditations. And as he knelt there alone in prayer, a poor woman entered the Church and asked an alms of him for the love of God.

'I have nothing,' the holy man replied; 'but the Altar is loaded with ornaments, and I will go see if I cannot find something to give you.'

A golden lamp hung above the Altar, decked about with silver bells. Examining the lamp, he said to himself:

'Those little bells are but idle vanities. The true ornament of yonder Altar is the body of St. Francis, which reposes naked under the flags with a black stone for a pillow.'

And drawing his knife from his pocket, he detached the little silver bells, one after the other, and gave them to the poor woman.

Presently, when the Sacristan, his meal finished,

THE LAMP

returned to the Church, Fra Giovanni, the holy man of God, said to him:

'Never trouble, my Brother, about the little bells that belonged to the lamp. I have given them away to a poor woman who had need of them.'

Now Fra Giovanni did in this wise, because he knew by revelation that all the things in this world, belonging to God, belong of rights to the poor.

And he was blamed on earth by men whose thoughts were given over to riches. But he was found praiseworthy in the sight of the Divine Goodness.

THE SERAPHIC DOCTOR

III

THE SERAPHIC DOCTOR

FRA GIOVANNI was not proficient in the knowledge of letters, and he rejoiced in his ignorance as being an abundant source of humiliations.

But after watching one day in the Cloister of Santa Maria degli Angeli a number of Doctors of Theology in meditation on the perfections of the Most Holy Trinity and the Mysteries of the Passion, he began to doubt whether they did not possess the love of God more fully than he, by reason of their wider knowledge.

He was afflicted in his soul, and for the first time in his life fell into melancholy. But sadness was unnatural to one in his estate; for joy is the inheritance of the poor.

He resolved to carry his difficulty to the General of the Order, to be rid of it as of a galling burden. Now Giovanni di Fidanza was General of the Order in those days.

In the cradle he had received from St. Francis himself the name of Bonaventure. He had studied Theology at the University of Paris; and he excelled in the science of Love, which is the science of God. He knew the four degrees which lift the creature to his Creator, and he pondered on the mystery of the six wings of the Cherubim. This was the reason why he was called the Seraphic Doctor.

And he was well aware that Science is vain without Love. Fra Giovanni found him walking in his garden, on the terrace overlooking the city.

It was a Sunday; and the handicraftsmen of the town and the peasants who work in the vineyards were climbing, at the foot of the terrace, the steep street that leads to the Church.

And Fra Giovanni, seeing Brother Bonaventure in the garden, in the midst of the lilies, drew near and said:

'Brother Bonaventure, free my mind of the doubt that is tormenting me, and tell me: Can an ignorant man love God with as great love as a learned Doctor of the Church?'

And Brother Bonaventure answered:

'I will tell you the truth, Fra Giovanni; a

THE SERAPHIC DOCTOR

poor old woman may not only equal but surpass all the Doctors of Theology in the world. And seeing the sole excellence of man lies in loving, I tell you again—the most ignorant of women shall be exalted in Heaven above the Doctors.'

Fra Giovanni, on hearing these words, was filled with great joy; and, leaning out over the low wall of the garden, looked lovingly at the passers-by. Then he cried out at the top of his voice:

'Ho! you poor women, ignorant and simple-minded, you shall be set in Heaven above Brother Bonaventure.'

And the Seraphic Doctor, hearing the good Brother's proclamation, smiled sweetly where he stood among the lilies of his garden.

THE LOAF ON THE FLAT STONE

IV

THE LOAF ON THE FLAT STONE

FORASMUCH as the good St. Francis had bidden his sons to 'Go, beg your bread from door to door,' Fra Giovanni was one day sent to a certain city. Having passed the Gate, he went up and down the streets to beg his bread from door to door, according to the rule of the Order, for the love of God.

But the folk of that city were more covetous than the men of Lucca, and harder than they of Perugia. The bakers and tanners who were dicing before their shop-doors, repulsed the poor man of Jesus Christ with harsh words. Even the young women, holding their new-born babes in their arms, turned their faces from him. And when the good Brother, whose joy was in dishonour, smiled at the refusals and insults he received,

'He is laughing at us,' said the townsmen to

each other. 'He is a born fool—or say rather a vagabond impostor and a drunkard. He has overdrunk himself with wine. It were a sin and a shame to give him so much as a crumb of bread from our hutch.'

And the good Brother answered:

'You say true, my friends; I am not worthy to stir your pity, nor fit to share the food of your dogs and your pigs.'

The children, who were just then coming out of school, overheard what was said, and ran after the holy man shouting:

'Madman! Madman!'—and pelted him with mud and stones.

Then Fra Giovanni went forth into the country. The city was built on the slope of a hill, and was surrounded by vineyards and oliveyards. He descended the hill by a hollow way, and seeing on either side the grapes of the vines that hung down from the branches of the elms, he stretched out his arm and blessed the clusters. Likewise he blessed the olive and the mulberry trees and all the wheat of the lowlands.

Meantime he was both hungry and thirsty; and he took delight in thirst and hunger.

LOAF ON THE FLAT STONE

At the end of a cross-road, he saw a wood of laurels; and it was the habit of the Begging Friars to go and pray in the woods, amongst the poor animals cruel men hunt and harry. Accordingly Fra Giovanni entered the wood, and fared on by the side of a brook that ran clear and singing on its way.

Presently he saw a flat stone beside the brook, and at the same moment a young man of a wondrous beauty, clad in a white robe, laid a loaf of bread on the stone, and disappeared.

And Fra Giovanni knelt down and prayed, saying:

'O God, how good art Thou, to send Thy poor man bread by the hand of one of Thy Angels. O blessed poverty! O very glorious and most sumptuous poverty!'

And he ate the loaf the Angel had brought, and drank the water of the brook, and was strengthened in body and in soul. And an invisible hand wrote on the walls of the city: 'Woe, woe to the rich!'

THE TABLE UNDER THE FIG-TREE

V

THE TABLE UNDER THE FIG-TREE

FOLLOWING the example of St. Francis, his well-beloved Father, Fra Giovanni used to visit the Hospital of Viterbo to help the lepers, giving them to drink and washing their sores.

And if they blasphemed, he used to tell them, 'You are the chosen sons of Jesus Christ.' And there were some lepers of a very humble spirit whom he would gather together in a chamber, and with whom he took delight as a mother does surrounded by her children.

But the Hospital walls were very thick, and daylight entered only by narrow windows high up above the floor. The air was so fetid the lepers could scarce live in the place at all. And Fra Giovanni noted how one of them, by name Lucido, who showed an exemplary

patience, was slowly dying of the evil atmosphere.

Fra Giovanni loved Lucido, and would tell him:

'My brother, you are Lucido, and no precious stone is purer than your heart, in the eyes of God.'

And observing how Lucido suffered more sorely than the others from the poisonous air they breathed in the Lepers' Ward, he said to him one day:

'Friend Lucido, dear Lamb of the Lord, while the very air they breathe in this place is pestilence, in the gardens of Santa Maria degli Angeli we inhale the sweet scent of the laburnums. Come you with me to the House of the Poor Brethren, and you will find relief.'

So speaking, he took the Leper by the arm, wrapped him in his own cloak and led him away to Santa Maria degli Angeli.

Arrived at the gate of the Monastery, he summoned the Doorkeeper with happy shouts of exultation:

'Open!' he cried, 'open to the friend I am bringing you. His name is Lucido, and a

good name it is, for he is a very pearl of patience.'

The Brother opened the Gate; but the instant he saw in Fra Giovanni's arms a man whose face, livid and all but expressionless, was covered over with scales, he knew him for a leper, and rushed off in terror to warn the Brother Superior. The latter's name was Andrea of Padua, and he was a man of very holy life. Nevertheless when he learned that Fra Giovanni was bringing a leper into the House of Santa Maria degli Angeli, he was very wroth, and coming to him with a face burning with anger, bade him:

'Stay there outside, with the man. You are a senseless fool to expose your brethren thus to contagion.'

Fra Giovanni only looked on the ground without venturing any reply. All the joy was gone from his face; and Lucido, seeing him troubled:

'Brother,' said he, 'I am grieved you are made sad because of me.'

And Fra Giovanni kissed the leper on the cheek.

Then he said, turning to the Superior:

'Will you suffer me, my Father, to stay outside the Gate with this man, and share my

meal with him?—to which the Father Superior answered:

'Even do as you please, seeing you set up yourself above the holy rule of obedience.'

And with these harsh words he went back again into the Monastery.

Now in front of the Gate was a stone bench under a fig-tree, and on this bench Fra Giovanni set down his bowl. But while he was supping with the Leper, the Father Superior had the Gate thrown open, and came and sat under the fig-tree and said:

'Forgive me, Fra Giovanni, for having given you offence. I am come hither now to share your meal.'

THE TEMPTATION

VI

THE TEMPTATION

THEN Satan sat him down on the brow of a hill, and gazed down at the House of the Poor Brethren. He was black and beautiful, like a young Egyptian. And he thought in his heart:

'Forasmuch as I am the Enemy of Mankind and the Adversary of God, therefore will I tempt these Monks, and I will tell them what is kept hid by Him who is their Friend. Lo! I will afflict these men of Religion by telling them the truth, and I will darken their spirit, uttering to them words of verity and reasonableness. I will plunge reflexion like a sword in their reins; and so soon as they shall know the reality of things, they will be unhappy. For joy there is none but in illusion, and peace is only to be found in ignorance. And because I am the Master of such as study the nature of plants and animals, the virtue of stones, the

secrets of fire, the courses of the stars and the influence of the planets, for this reason men have named me the Prince of Darkness. Likewise they call me the Wily One, because by me was constructed the plummet-line whereby Ulpian straightened out the Law. And my kingdom is of this world. Well then, I will try these Monks, and I will make them to know their works are evil, and that the tree of their Charity bears bitter fruit. Yea! I will tempt them without hate and without love.'

Thus said Satan in his heart. Meantime, as the shades of evening were lengthening along the base of the hills and the cottage chimneys were smoking for the evening meal, the holy man Giovanni issued from out the wood where he was wont to pray, and turned into the road leading to Santa Maria degli Angeli, saying:

'My house is the house of joy and delight, because it is the house of poverty.'

And seeing Fra Giovanni wending his way homewards, Satan thought:

'Lo! here is one of those men I am come to tempt';—and drawing his black cloak over his head, he advanced along the high road,

which was bordered with terebinths, to meet the holy man.

Now Satan had made himself like a widow-woman with a veil, and when he had joined Fra Giovanni, he put on a honeyed voice and asked an alms of him, saying:

'Give me an alms for the love of Him who is your friend, and whom I am not worthy so much as to name.'

And Fra Giovanni answered:

'It happens so, I have with me a little silver cup a nobleman of the countryside gave me, to have it melted down and used for the Altar of Santa Maria degli Angeli. You may take that, lady; and I will go to-morrow and ask the nobleman to let me have another of the same weight for the Blessed Virgin. Thus will his wishes be accomplished, and over and above, you will have gotten an alms for the love of God.'

Satan took the cup and said:

'Good brother, suffer a poor widow-woman to kiss your hand. For verily the hand that gives gifts is soft and fragrant.'

Fra Giovanni replied:

'Lady, be heedful not to kiss my hand. On

the contrary, begone with all speed. For, methinks, you are winsome of face, albeit black as the Magian King that bore the frankincense and myrrh; and it is not becoming I should look on you longer, seeing how danger is for ever dogging the lonely man's steps. Wherefore suffer me now to leave you, commending you to God's care. And forgive me, if I have failed aught in politeness towards you, lady. For the good St. Francis was used to say: "Courtesy shall be the ornament of my sons, as the flowers bedeck the hillsides."'

But Satan said again:

'Good Father, inform me at the least of a guest-house, where I may pass the night honestly.'

Fra Giovanni replied:

'Go, mistress, to the House of St. Damian, where dwell the poor ladies of Our Lord. She who will welcome you is Clare, and indeed she is a clear mirror of purity; the same is the Duchess of Poverty.'

And Satan said again:

'My Father, I am an adulterous woman, and I have lain with many men.'

And Fra Giovanni said:

'Lady, if I really deemed you laden with the sins you tell of, I would crave of you as a high honour to kiss your feet, for I am less worth than you, and your crimes are little compared with mine. Yet have I received greater favours of Heaven than have been accorded to you. For in the days when St. Francis and his twelve disciples were still upon earth, I lived with Angels of Heaven.'

And Satan returned:

'My Father, when I asked you an alms for the love of Him who loves you, I was cherishing in my heart a wicked intent, and I am fain to tell you what this was. I wander the roads a-begging, in order to collect a sum of money I destine for a man of Perosa who is my paramour, and who has promised me, on handling this money, to kill traitorously a certain knight I hate, because when I offered my body to him, he scorned me. Well! the total was yet incomplete; but now the weight of your silver cup has made it up. So the alms you have given me will be the price of blood. You have sold a just man to death. For the Knight I told you of is chaste, temperate and pious, and I hate him for this cause. 'Tis you will

have brought about his murder. You have laid a weight of silver in the scale of crime, to bear it down.'

Hearing these words, the good Fra Giovanni wept, and drawing aside, he fell on his knees in a thorn-brake, and prayed the Lord, saying: 'O Lord, make this crime to fall neither on this woman's head nor on mine nor on that of any of Thy creatures, but let it be put beneath Thy feet, which were pierced with the nails, and be washed in Thy most precious blood. Distil on me and on this my sister of the highway a drop of hyssop, and we shall be purified, and shall overpass the snow in whiteness.'

But the Enemy fled away, thinking: 'This man I have not been able to tempt by reason of his utter simplicity.'

THE SUBTLE DOCTOR

VII

THE SUBTLE DOCTOR

SATAN returned and sat on the Mountain that looks towards Viterbo, laughing under its crown of olives. And he said in his heart: 'I will tempt that man yonder.'

He conceived this purpose in his spirit, because he had seen Fra Giovanni, girt about with a cord, and a sack over his shoulder, crossing the meadows below on his way to the city to beg his bread there according to the rules.

So Satan took on the appearance of a holy Bishop, and came down into the plain. A mitre was on his head sparkling with precious stones, that flashed like actual fire in the sunlight. His cope was covered with figures embroidered and painted so beautifully no craftsman in all the world could have wrought their like. Amongst the rest he was depicted himself, in silk and gold, under the guise of a St. George and a St. Sebastian, as also under that of a

Virgin St. Catherine and the Empress Helena. The loveliness of the faces troubled the mind and saddened the heart. The garment was truly of a wondrous workmanship, and nothing so rich and rare is to be seen in the Treasuries of Churches.

Thus decked in cope and mitre, and majestic as St. Ambrose, the glory of Milan, Satan pursued his way, leaning on his crozier, over the flowery plain.

Presently nearing the holy man, he hailed him and said:

'Peace be with you!'

But he said not of what sort this peace was; and Fra Giovanni supposed it was the peace of the Lord. He thought to himself:

'This Bishop, who gives me the salutation of peace, was doubtless in his lifetime a sainted Pontiff and a blessed Martyr unshakable in his constancy. That is why Jesus Christ has changed the wooden cross to a golden in the hands of this gallant Confessor of the Faith. To-day he is powerful in Heaven; and lo! after his holy and happy death, he walks in these meadows that are painted with flowers and broidered with pearls of dew.'

THE SUBTLE DOCTOR

Such were the good Giovanni's thoughts, and he was in no wise abashed. So saluting Satan with a deep reverence, he said:

'Sir! You are exceeding gracious to appear to a poor man such as I. But indeed these meadows are so lovely, 'tis no wonder if the Saints of Paradise come to walk here; they are painted with flowers and broidered with pearls of dew. The Lord did very kindly when he made them.'

And Satan said to him:

'It is not the meadows, it is your heart I am fain to look at; I have come down from the Mountain to speak with you. I have, in bygone Centuries, held many high disputations in the Church. Amid the assembled Doctors my voice would boom forth like thunder, and my thoughts flash like lightning. I am very learned, and they name me the Subtle Doctor. I have disputed with God's Angels. Now I would hold dispute with you.'

Fra Giovanni made answer:

'Nay! but how should the poor little man that I am hold dispute with the Subtle Doctor? I know nothing, and my simplicity is such I can keep nothing in my head but those songs in

the vulgar tongue where they have stuck in rhymes to help the memory, as in

> Jesus, mirror of my soul,
> Cleanse my heart and make it whole,

or in

> Holy Mary, Maid of Flowers,
> Lead me to the Heavenly Bowers.'

And Satan anwered:

'Fra Giovanni, the Venetian ladies amuse their leisure and show their adroitness in fitting a multitude of little pieces of ivory into a box of cedarwood, which at the set-off seemed all too small to contain so many. In the same fashion I will pack ideas into your head that no one would have dreamed it could ever hold; and I will fill you with a new wisdom. I will show that, thinking to walk in the right way, you are straying abroad all the while like a drunken man, and that you are driving the plough without any heed to draw the furrows straight.'

Fra Giovanni humbled himself, saying:

'It is most true I am a fool, and do nothing but what is wrong.'

Then Satan asked him:

'What think you of poverty?'—and the holy man replied:

'I think it is a pearl of price.'

But Satan retorted:

'You pretend poverty is a great good; yet all the while you are robbing the poor of a part of this great good, by giving them alms.'

Fra Giovanni pondered over this, and said:

'The alms I give, I give to Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose poverty cannot be minished, for it is infinite. It gushes from Him as from an inexhaustible fountain; and its waters flow freely for His favourite sons. And these shall be poor always, according to the promise of the Son of God. In giving to the poor, I am giving not to men, but to God, as the citizens pay tax to the Podestà, and the rate is for the City, which of the money it so receives supplies the town's needs. Now what I give is for paving the City of God. It was a vain thing to be poor in deed, if we be not poor in spirit. The gown of frieze, the cord, the sandals, the wallet and the wooden bowl are only signs and symbols. The Poverty I love is spiritual, and I address her as *Lady*, because she is an idea, and all beauty resides in this same idea.'

Satan smiled, and replied:

'Your maxims, Fra Giovanni, are the maxims

of a wise man of Greece, Diogenes by name, who taught at their Universities in the times when Alexander of Macedon was waging his wars.'

And Satan said again:

'Is it true you despise the goods of this world?'

And Fra Giovanni replied:

'I do despise them.'

And Satan said to him:

'Look you! in scorning these, you are scorning at the same time the hard-working men who produce them, and so doing, fulfil the order given to your first father, Adam, when he was commanded, "In the sweat of thy face, shalt thou eat bread." Seeing work is good, the fruit of this work is good too. Yet you work not, neither have any care for the work of others. But you receive and give alms, in contempt of the law laid on Adam and on his seed through the ages.'

'Alas!' sighed Brother Giovanni, 'I am laden with crimes, and at once the most wicked and the most foolish man in all the world. Wherefore never heed me, but read in the Book. Our Lord said, "Consider the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin." Again He

said, "Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."'

Then Satan lifted up his hand, with the gesture of one who disputes and prepares to count off his arguments on the fingers. And he said:

'Giovanni, Giovanni! what was written in one sense, you read in another; you are less like a Doctor at his desk than an ass at the manger. So must I correct you, as a master corrects his scholar. It is written the lilies of the field have no need to spin—because they are beautiful, and beauty is a virtue. Again it is written how Mary is not to do the household tasks, because she is doing lovingly to Him who has come to see her. But you, who are not beautiful nor yet instructed, like Mary, in the things of love, you drag out a contemptible existence wandering the highways.'

Giovanni made reply:

'Sir! just as a Painter will depict on a narrow panel of wood an entire city with its houses and towers and walls, so you have painted in a few words my soul and my similitude with a wondrous exactness. And I am altogether what you describe. But if I followed perfectly the rule stablished by St. Francis, that Angel of God,

and if I practised spiritual poverty to the full, I should be the lily of the fields and I should have the good part of Mary.'

But Satan interrupted him, and cried:

'You profess to love the poor, yet you prefer the rich man and his riches, and adore Him who possesses treasures to give away.'

And Fra Giovanni answered:

'He I love possesses not the good things of the body, but those of the spirit.'

And Satan retorted:

'All good things are of the flesh, and are tasted of through the flesh. This Epicurus taught, and Horace the Satirist said the same in his Verses.'

At these words the holy man only sighed and said:

'Sir! I cannot tell what you mean.'

Satan shrugged his shoulders and said:

'My words are exact and literal, yet the man cannot tell what I mean. I have disputed with Augustine and Jerome, with Gregory and him of the Golden Mouth, Chrysostom. And they comprehended me still less. Miserable men walk groping in the dark, and Error lifts over their head her monstrous canopy. Simple

and sage alike are the plaything of eternal falsehood.'

And Satan said again to the holy man Giovanni:

'Have you won happiness? If you have happiness, I shall not prevail against you. A man's thoughts are only stirred by sorrow, and their meditations by grief. Then, tortured by fears and desires, he turns anxiously in his bed and rends his pillow with lies. What use to tempt this man? He is happy.'

But Fra Giovanni sighed:

'Sir!' I am less happy since listening to you. Your words trouble my mind.'

On hearing this, Satan cast away his pastoral staff, his mitre and his cope; and stood there naked and unashamed. He was black and more beautiful than the loveliest of the Angels. He smiled gently, and said to the holy man:

'Friend, be comforted. I am the Evil Spirit.'

THE BURNING COAL

VIII

THE BURNING COAL

NOW Brother Giovanni was simple of heart and spirit, and his tongue was tied; he knew not the secret of speaking to his fellow-men.

But one day when he was praying, as his habit was, at the foot of an ancient holm-oak, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and saluting him said:

'I salute you, because it is I who visit the simple-minded, and announce the mysteries to virgins.'

And the Angel held in his hand a burning coal. This he laid on the holy man's lips, and spoke again, and said:

'By virtue of this fire shall your lips remain pure, and they shall glow with eloquence. I have burned them, and they shall be burned. Your tongue shall be loosed, and you shall speak to your fellows. For men must hear

the word of life, and learn how they shall not be saved but by innocency of heart. For this cause the Lord has unloosed the tongue of the simple and innocent.'

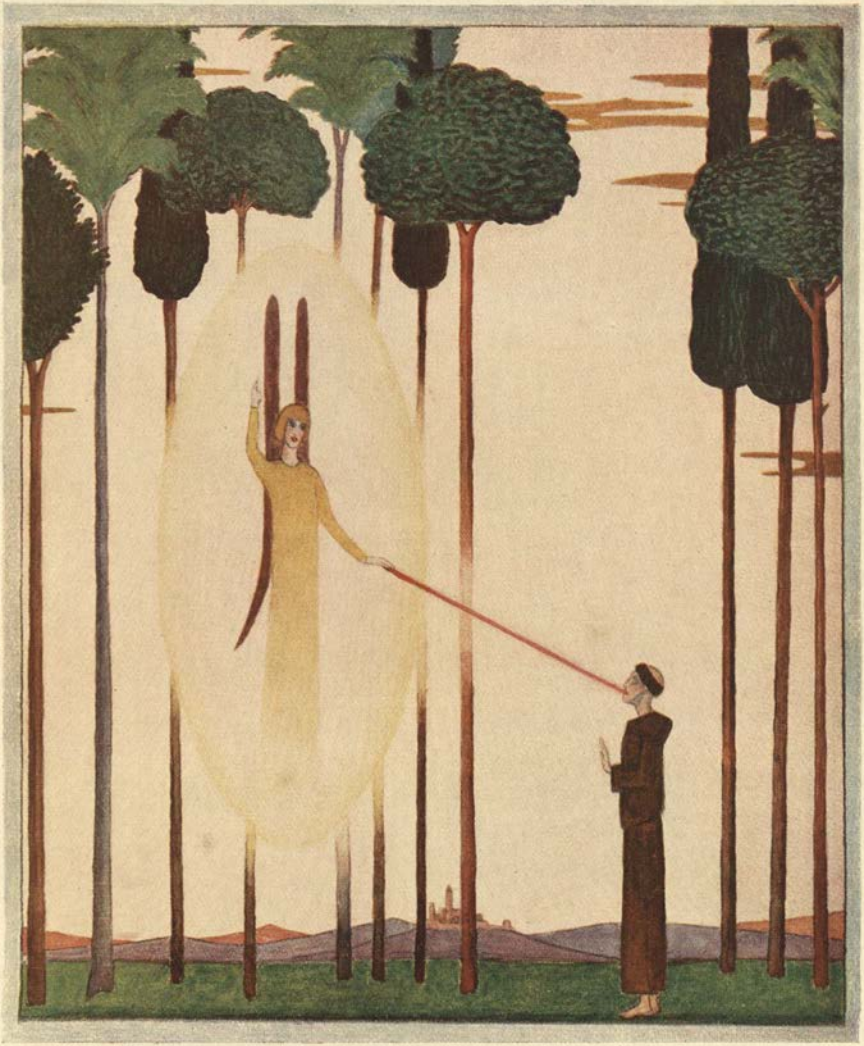
Then the Angel went back again to Heaven. And the holy man was seized with terror, and he prayed, saying:

'O God, my heart is so sore troubled I cannot find on my lips the sweet savour of the fire Thy Angel hath touched them with.

'Thou wouldst chasten me, O Lord, seeing Thou dost send me to speak to the folk, who will not hearken to my words. I shall be hateful to all men, and Thy priests themselves will declare, "He is a blasphemer!"

'For Thy reason is contrary to the reason of men. Nevertheless Thy will be done.'

Then he rose up from his knees, and set out on his way citywards.



THE BURNING COAL

THE HOUSE OF INNOCENCE

IX

THE HOUSE OF INNOCENCE

ON that day Fra Giovanni had left the Monastery at early dawn, the hour when the birds awake and begin singing. He was on his way to the city and he thought within himself: 'I am going to the city to beg my bread and to give bread to other beggars; I shall give away what I receive, and take back what I have given. For it is good to ask and to receive for the love of God. And he who receives is the brother of him who gives. And we should not consider too curiously which of the twain brothers we are, because truly the gift is naught, but everything is in the gracious giving.

'He that receives, if he have gracious charity, is the equal of him that gives. But he who sells is the enemy of him who buys, and the seller constrains the buyer to be his foe. Herein lies the root of the curse that poisons cities, as

the venom of the serpent is in his tail. And it must needs be a Lady set her foot on the serpent's tail, and that Lady is Poverty. Already hath she visited King Louis of France in his Tower; but never yet entered among the Florentines, because she is chaste and will not put foot in a place of ill repute. Now the money-changer's shop is an ill place, for it is there Bankers and Changers commit the most heinous of sins. Harlots sin in the brothels; but their sin is not so great as is that of the Bankers, and whosoever grows rich by banking and money-dealing.

'Verily I say unto you, Bankers and Money-changers shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, nor yet bakers, nor dealers in drugs, nor such as practise the trade of wool, which is the boast of the City of the Lily. Forasmuch as they give a price to gold, and make a profit out of exchange, they are setting up idols in the face of men. And when they declare "Gold has a value," they tell a lie. For Gold is more vile than the dry leaves that flutter and rustle in the Autumn wind under the terebinths. There is nothing precious save the work of men's hands, when God gives it His countenance.'

THE HOUSE OF INNOCENCE

And lo! as he was meditating in this wise, Fra Giovanni saw that the Mountain side was torn open, and that men were dragging great stones from its flank. And one of the quarrymen was lying by the wayside, with a rag of coarse cloth for all covering; and his body was disfigured by bitter marks of the biting cold and scorching heat. The bones of his shoulders and chest showed all but bare beneath the meagre flesh; and Despair looked out grim and gaunt from the black cavern of his eyes.

Fra Giovanni approached him, saying:

'Peace be with you!'

But the quarryman made no answer, and did not so much as turn his head. So Fra Giovanni, thinking he had not heard, repeated:

'Peace be with you!'—and then the same words again for the third time.

At last the quarryman looked up at him sullenly, and growled:

'I shall have no peace till I am dead. Begone, cursed black crow! you wish me peace; that shows you are a glozing cheat! Go to, and caw to simpler fools than I! I know very well the quarryman's lot is an utterly miserable one, and there is no comfort for his wretchedness.

I hale out stones from dawn to dark, and for price of my toil, all I get is a scrap of black bread. Then when my arms are no longer as strong as the stones of the mountain, and my body is all worn out, I shall perish of hunger.'

'Brother!' said the holy man Giovanni; 'it is not just or right you should hale out so much stone, and win so little bread.'

Then the quarryman rose to his feet, and pointing, 'Master Monk,' said he, 'what see you up yonder on the hill?'

'Brother, I see the walls of the City.'

'And above them?'

'Above them I see the roofs of the houses, which crown the ramparts.'

'And higher still?'

'The tops of the pines, the domes of the Churches and the Belltowers.'

'And higher still?'

'I see a Tower overtopping all the rest, and crowned with battlements. It is the Tower of the Podestà.'

'Monk, what see you above the battlements of that Tower?'

'I see nothing, brother, above the battlements save the sky.'

'But I,' cried the quarryman, 'I see upon that Tower a hideous giant brandishing a club, and on the club is inscribed: OPPRESSION. Yea! Oppression is lifted up above the citizens' heads on the Great Tower of the Magistrates and the City's Laws.'

And Fra Giovanni answered:

'What one man sees, another cannot see, and it may be the horrid shape you describe is set on the Tower of the Podestà yonder, in the city of Viterbo. But is there no remedy for the ills you endure, my brother? The good St. Francis left behind him on this earth so full a fountain of consolation that all men may draw refreshment therefrom.'

Then the quarryman spoke after this fashion:

'Men have said, "This mountain is ours." And these men are my masters, and it is for them I hew stone. And they enjoy the fruit of my labour.'

Fra Giovanni sighed:

'Surely men must be mad to believe they own a mountain.'

But the quarryman replied:

'Nay! they are not mad; and the Laws of the City guarantee them their ownership. The

citizens pay them for the stones I have hewn, which are marbles of great price.'

And Fra Giovanni said:

'We must change the laws of the City and the habits of the citizens. St. Francis, that Angel of God, has given the example and shown the way. When he resolved, by God's command, to rebuild the ruined Church of St. Damian, he did not set out to find the master of the quarry. He did not say, "Go buy me the finest marbles, and I will give you gold in exchange." For the holy man, who was called the son of Bernardone and who was the true son of God, knew this, that the man who sells is the enemy of the man who buys, and that the art of Trafficking is more mischievous, if possible, than the art of War. Wherefore he did not apply to the master-masons or any of them that give marble and timber and lead in exchange for money. But he went forth into the Mountain and gathered his load of wood and stones, and bore it himself to the spot hallowed to the memory of the Blessed Damian. With his own hands, by help of the mason's line, he laid the stones to form the walls; and he made the cement to bind together the stones one to another.

Finished, it was a lowly circuit of roughly fashioned stones, the work of a weakling. But who considers it with the eyes of the soul recognizes therein an Angel's thought. For the mortar of this wall was not worked with the blood of the unfortunate; this house of St. Damian was not raised with the thirty pieces of silver paid for the blood of that Just Man, which, rejected by Iscariot, go travelling the world ever since, passing from hand to hand, to buy up all the injustice and all the cruelty of the earth.

'For, alone of all others, this house is founded on Innocence, stablished on Love, based on Charity, and alone of all others it is the House of God.

'And I tell you verily, quarryman and brother, the poor man of Jesus Christ, in doing these things, gave to the world an example of Justice, and one day his foolishness shall shine forth as wisdom. For all things in this earth are God's and we are His children; and it is meet the children should share alike in His inheritance. That is, each should get what he has need of. And seeing grown men do not ask for broth, nor babes for wine, the share of each shall not

be the same, but each shall have the heritage that is fitting for him.

'And labour shall be a joyful thing, when it is no longer paid. 'Tis gold only, the cursed gold, that makes the sharing uneven. When each man shall go severally to the Mountain for his stone, and carry his load to the city on his own back, the stone shall weigh light and it shall be the stone of cheerfulness. And we will build the house of joy and gladness, and the new city shall rise from its foundations. And there shall be neither rich nor poor, but all men will call themselves poor men, because they will be glad to bear a name that brings them honour.'

So spoke the gentle Fra Giovanni, and the unhappy quarryman thought to himself:

'This man clad in a shroud and girt with a cord has proclaimed new tidings. I shall not see the end of my miseries, for I am going to die of hunger and exhaustion. But I shall die happy, for my eyes, before they close, will have beheld the dawn of the day of Justice.'

THE FRIENDS OF ORDER

X

THE FRIENDS OF ORDER

NOW in those days there was in the very illustrious city of Viterbo a Confraternity of sixty old men. These counted among their number many of the chief men of the place; and their objects were the accumulation of honours and riches, and the pursuit of virtue. The Brotherhood included a Gonfalonier of the Republic, Doctors of either faculty, Judges, Merchants, Money-changers of conspicuous piety, and one or two old Soldiers of Fortune grown too ancient and feeble for the Wars.

Seeing they were banded together for the purpose of stirring up their fellow citizens to goodness and good order, and to bear mutual witness to the practice of these virtues, they gave themselves the title of *The Friends of Order*. This name was inscribed on the banner of the Confraternity, and they were all of one mind to persuade the poor to follow goodness

and good order, to the end no changes might be made in the Constitution.

Their habit was to meet on the last day of each month, in the Palace of the Podestà, to make inquiry of each other what of good had been done in the city during the month. And to such of the poorer citizens as had done well and orderly, they used to present pieces of money. Now on a certain day the Friends of Order were holding meeting. At one end of the Hall was a raised platform covered with velvet, and over the platform a magnificent canopy of state, held up by four figures carved and painted. These figures represented Justice, Temperance, Strength and Chastity; and beneath the canopy sat the Officers of the Brotherhood. The President, who was entitled the Dean, took his place in the middle on a golden chair, which in richness was scarce inferior to the throne that once upon a time the disciple of St. Francis saw prepared in Heaven for the poor man of the Lord. This seat of state had been presented to the Dean of the Brotherhood to the end that in him should be honoured all the goodness done in the city.

And as soon as the Members of the Confraternity were ranged in the fitting order, the Dean got up to speak. He congratulated any serving-maids that served their masters without receiving wages, and spoke highly of the old men who, having no bread to eat, did not ask for any.

And he said:

'These have done well, and we shall reward them. For it behoves that goodness be rewarded, and it is our bounden duty to pay the price of it, being as we are the first and foremost citizens of the city.'

And when he finished speaking, the crowd of the general folk that stood under the platform clapped their hands.

But no sooner had they done applauding than Fra Giovanni lifted up his voice from the midst of the miserable, poverty-stricken band, and asked loudly:

'What is goodness?'

At this great clamour arose in the assembly, and the Dean shouted:

'Who was it spoke?'

And a red-haired man who was standing among the people, answered:

'It was a Monk, by name Giovanni, who is the disgrace of his Cloister. He goes naked through the streets, carrying his clothes on his head, and gives himself up to all sorts of extravagances.

Next a Baker spoke up and said:

'He is a madman or a miscreant! He begs his bread at the Bakers' doors.'

Then a number of those present, shouting noisily and dragging Fra Giovanni by the gown, tried to hustle him out of the hall, while others, more angry still, began throwing stools and breaking them over the holy man's head. But the Dean rose from his seat under the canopy, and said:

'Leave the man in peace, so that he may hear me and be confounded. He asks what goodness is, because goodness is not in him and he is devoid of virtue. I answer him, "The knowledge of goodness resides in virtuous men; and good citizens carry within them a proper respect for the laws. They approve what has been done in the city to ensure to each man enjoyment of the riches he may have acquired. They support the established order of things, and are ready to fly to arms to defend the

same. For the duty of the poor is to defend the good things belonging to the rich; and this is how the union betwixt citizens is maintained. This is goodness and good order. Again, the rich man has his serving-man bring out a basket full of bread, which he distributes to the poor; and this is goodness again." These are the lessons this rough, ignorant fellow required to be taught.'

Having so said, the Dean sat down, and the crowd of poor folks raised a murmur of approval. But Fra Giovanni, stepping on one of the stools that had been thrown at his head with contumely and insult, addressed them all and said:

'Hear the words of comfort! Goodness resides not in men, for men know not of themselves what is good. They are ignorant of their own nature and destiny. What seems good, may be evil all the while; and what is deemed useful, harmful. No man can choose the things meet for him, because he knows not his own needs, but is like the little child sitting in the meadows, that sucks for wholesome milk the juice of the deadly nightshade. The babe does not know that the nightshade is a poison;

but its mother knows. This is why goodness is to do the will of God.

'It is false to say, "'Tis I teach goodness, and goodness is to obey the city laws." For the Laws are not of God; they are of man, and share in man's craft and cunning and imperfection. They are like the rules children make in the Square of Viterbo, when they are playing ball. Goodness is not in customs nor in laws; it is in God and in the accomplishment of God's will upon earth, and it is neither by law-makers nor magistrates that God's will is accomplished upon the earth.

'For the great men of this world do their own will, and their will is contrary to God's. But they who have stripped off pride and know there is no goodness in them, these men receive noble gifts, and God Himself distils His sweetness within them like honey in the hollow of the oaks.

'And we must be the oak-tree full of honey and dew. Humble, ignorant and simple folks, these have knowledge of God; and by them shall God's kingdom be stablished on earth. Salvation is not in the strength of laws nor in the multitude of soldiers; it is in poverty and humbleness of spirit.

'Say not, "Goodness is in me, and I teach goodness." Rather say, "Goodness is in God on high." Over long have men hardened their hearts in their own wisdom. Over long have they set up the Lion and the She-Wolf above the Gates of their Cities. Their wisdom and their prudence have brought about slavery and wars and the shedding of much innocent blood. Wherefore you should put your guidance in God's hand, as the blind man trusts himself to his dog's guidance. Fear not to shut the eyes of your spirit and have done with Reason, for has not Reason made you unhappy and wicked? By Reason have you grown like the man who, having guessed the secrets of the Beast crouching in the cavern, waxed proud of his knowingness, and deeming himself wiser than his fellows, slew his father and wedded his mother.

'God was not with him; but He is with the humble and simple-minded. Learn not to will and He will put His will in you. Seek not to guess the riddles of the Beast. Be ignorant, and you shall not fear to go astray. 'Tis only wise men that are deceived.'

Fra Giovanni having thus spoken, the Dean got up and said:

'The miscreant has insulted me, and I willingly forgive him the insult. But he has spoken against the laws of Viterbo, and it is meet he should be punished.'

So Fra Giovanni was led before the Judges, who had him loaded with chains and cast him into the city gaol.

THE REVOLT OF GENTLENESS

XI

THE REVOLT OF GENTLENESS

THE holy man Giovanni was chained to a massive pillar in the middle of the dungeon over which the river flowed.

Two other prisoners were plunged along with him in the thick and fetid darkness. Both these had realized and proclaimed the injustice of the Laws. One was for overthrowing the Republic by force. He had been guilty of startling assassinations, and his hope was to purify the city with fire and sword. The other trusted to be able to change men's hearts, and had delivered very persuasive discourses. Inventor of wise laws, he counted on the charms of his genius and the innocency of his life to induce his fellow-citizens to submit to them. But both had met with the same doom. When they learned how the holy man was chained alongside of them for having spoken against the laws of the city, they congratulated

him. And the one who had invented wise laws, said to him:

'If ever, brother, we are restored to liberty, seeing you think as I do, you shall help me to persuade the citizens that they ought to set up above them the empire of just laws.'

But the holy man Giovanni answered him:

'What matter for Justice being in the Laws, if it is not in men's hearts? And if men's hearts are unjust, what gain shall it be that Equity reign in the Courts of Law?

'Say not, "We will stablish just laws, and we will render to every man what is his due." For no one is just, and we know not what is meet for men. We are no less ignorant what is good for them and what is evil. And whensoever the Princes of the People and the Chiefs of the Commonwealth have loved Justice, they have caused the slaying of many folk.

'Give not the compass and the level to the false measurer; for with true instruments, he will make untrue apportionments. And he will say: "See, I carry on me the level, the rule and the square, and I am a good measurer." So long as men shall be covetous and cruel, will they make the most merciful laws cruel,

and will rob their brethren with words of love on their lips. This is why it is vain to reveal to them the words of love and the laws of gentleness.

'Set not up laws against laws, nor raise tables of marble and tables of brass before men's eyes. For whatever is written on the tables of the Law, is written in letters of blood.'

So spoke the holy man. And the other prisoner,—he who had committed startling murders, and contrived the ruin that was to save the city, approved his words and said:

'Comrade, you have spoken well. Know you, I will never set up law against law, right rule against crooked rule; my wish is to destroy the law by violence and compel the citizens to live thenceforth in happy freedom. And know further that I have slain both judges and soldiers, and have committed many crimes for the public good.'

Hearing these words, the man of the Lord rose, stretched out his manacled arms in the heavy darkness and cried:

'Ill betide the violent! for violence ever begets violence. Whosoever acts like you is sowing the earth with hate and fury, and his children

shall tear their feet with the wayside briars, and serpents shall bite their heel.

'Ill betide you! for you have shed the blood of the unjust judge and the brutal soldier, and lo! you are become like the soldier and the judge yourself. Like them you bear on your hands the indelible stain.

'A fool the man who says, "We will do evildoing in our turn, and our heart shall be comforted. We will be unjust, and it shall be the beginning of justice." Evildoing is in evil desiring. Desire nothing, and evildoing will be done away. Injustice hurts only the unjust; I shall suffer no harm of it, if I am just. Oppression is a sword whose hilt wounds the hand of him who holds it; but its point cannot pierce the heart of the man who is simple-minded and good and kind.

'For such a one nothing is dangerous, if he fear nothing. To endure all things, is to endure nothing. Let us be good and kindly, and the whole round world shall be the same. For the world will be an instrument for your goodness, and your persecutors will work to make you better and more beautiful.

'You love life, and this is an affection which

rules the heart of every man. Then love suffering; for to live is to suffer. Never envy your cruel masters; rather have compassion for the commanders of armies. Pity the Publicans and Judges; the proudest of them have known the stings of grief and the terrors of death. Happier you, because your consciences are void of offence; for you, let grief lose its bitterness and death its terrors.

'Be ye God's children, and tell yourselves, "All is well in Him." Beware of pursuing even the public good with overmuch violence and avidity, for fear something of cruelty mar your integrity. Rather should your desire of universal lovingkindness have the unction of a prayer and the soft fervour of a hope.

'Fair the table, whereat every man shall get his just portion, and the guests shall each one wash the other's feet. But say not, "I will set up this table by force in the streets of the city and in the public squares." For it is not knife in hand you must call together your brethren to the feast of Justice and Gentleness. Of its own accord must the board be spread in the Campo di Marte, by virtue of graciousness and good will.

'This shall be a miracle; and be sure, miracles are not wrought save by faith and love. If you disobey your masters, let it be by love. Neither fetter nor kill them, but tell them rather, "I will never slay my brothers, nor throw them into chains." Endure, suffer, submit, will what God wills, and your will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven. What seems evil is evil, and what seems good is good. Striving and discontent is the true curse of mankind. Let us then be peaceful and content, and never strike the wicked, for fear we make ourselves like them.

'If we have not the good fortune to be poor in very deed, let us not make ourselves rich men in spirit, and heartbound to the things of this world that make folk unjust and unhappy. Let us suffer persecution with gentleness, and be those chosen vessels that turn into balm the gall poured into them.'

WORDS OF LOVE

XII

WORDS OF LOVE

THEN the Judges had the holy man, Giovanni, brought before them chained to him who had thrown Greek fire in the Palace of the Priors. And they said to the holy man:

'You are alongside of the guilty because you are not on our side. For whosoever is not with good citizens is with evil.'

And the holy man answered them:

'There are neither good nor evil among men; but all alike are unhappy. And they who suffer neither hunger nor contumely, they are afflicted by riches and power. It is not given to any man born of woman to escape the miseries of life, and the son of woman is like a fever patient, who turns and turns in his bed, and can find no rest, because he will not lie down on the Cross of Jesus, his head among the thorns, and take his joy in suffering. Yet

is it in suffering that joy is found; and they who love know this.

'I companion with Love, but that man with Hate; and for this cause we can never come together. And I say to him, "Brother, you have done ill, and your crime is great and grievous. And I speak so, because Charity and Love urge me. But you, you condemn yonder guilty man in the name of Justice. But invoking Justice, you take a vain oath, for there is no such thing as Justice among men. We are all of us guilty. And when you say, "The life of peoples is in our hand," you are lying, and you are the coffin which declares, "I am the cradle." The life of peoples is in the harvests of the field, which grow yellow beneath the Lord's sight. It is in the vines hanging from the elms, and in the smiles and tears wherein heaven bathes the fruits of the trees in the orchard closes. It is not in the laws, which are made by the rich and powerful for the maintenance of their own power and riches.

'Ye forget how ye are all born poor and naked. And He who came to lie in the manger at Bethlehem, has come without profiting you.

And He must needs be born again and be crucified a second time for your salvation.

'The man of violence has laid hold of the arms you forged; and is well compared to the warriors you hold in honour because they have destroyed cities. What is defended by force shall be attacked by force. And if you have wit to read the book you have written, you will find what I say therein. For you have put in your book that the right of nations is the right of war; and you have glorified violence, paying honours to conquering generals and raising statues in your public squares to them and their war-horses.

'And you have laid it down, "There is violence that is right, and violence that is wrong, And this is the right of nations and this is the law." But so soon as the men shall have put you outside the law, they will be the law, even as you became the law, when you had overthrown the tyrant that was the law before you.

'Now, be assured, it is very certain that there is no true right save in the renouncing of right. There is no hallowed law save in love. There is no Justice save in Charity. 'Tis not by force we should resist force, for strife only hardens

the fighters' hearts and the issue of battles is aye dubious. But if we oppose gentleness to violence, this latter getting no hold upon its adversary, falls dead of itself.

'It is related by learned men in the *Bestiaries* how the unicorn, which bears on its forehead a flaming sword, transfixes the hunter in his coat-of-mail, but falls to its knees before a pure virgin. Be ye gentle-hearted, therefore, and simple-souled; keep your heart pure, and ye shall fear nothing.

'Put not your trust in the sword of the Condottieri, for did not the shepherd boy's smooth stone pierce Goliath's brow? But be ye strong in love, and love them that hate you. Hate, when unreturned, is robbed of half its sting; and what is left is weak, widowed, and like to die. Strip yourselves, that other men strip you not. Love your enemies, that they become your friends. Forgive, that ye may be forgiven. Say not, "Gentleness is a bane to the shepherds of the peoples." For how can you know, seeing these have never tried? They profess by harshness to have lessened the evil of the world. Yet is evil still rampant among men, and there is never a sign of its growing less.

'I said to some, "Be not oppressors," and to others, "Rise not in revolt against oppression," —and neither hearkened to me. They cast the stone of derision at me. Because I was on all men's side, each reproached me and said, "You are not on my side."

'I said, "I am the friend of the wretched." But you never thought I was your friend, because in your pride, you know not that you are wretched. Nevertheless the wretchedness of the master is more cruel than that of the slave. My tender pity for your woes only made you think I was mocking you; and the oppressed deemed me to be of the party of the oppressors. "He has no bowels," they said. Nay! but I am on the side of love and not of hate. This is why you scorn me; and because I preach peace on earth, you hold me for a fool. You think my words wander all ways, like the steps of a drunken man. And it is very true I walk your fields like those harpers who, on the eve of battles, come to play before the tents. And the soldiers say, as they listen: "'Tis some poor simpletons come playing the tunes we heard long ago in our mountains." I am this harper that roams

between the hosts in battle array of hostile armies. When I think whither human wisdom leads, I am glad to be a madman and a simpleton; and I thank God that he has given me the harp to handle and not the sword.'

THE TRUTH

XIII

THE TRUTH

THE holy man Giovanni was very straitly confined in gaol, where he was fastened by chains to rings built into the wall. But his soul was unfettered, and no tortures had been able to shake his firmness. He promised himself he would never betray the faith that was in him, and was ready to be witness and martyr of the Truth, to the end he might die in God. And he said to himself, 'Truth shall go along with me to the scaffold. She shall look at me and weep and say, "My tears flow, seeing it is for my sake this man is going to his death."'
And as the holy man was thus holding colloquy of his own thoughts in the solitude of his dungeon, a knight entered into the prison, without ever the doors having been opened. He was clad in a red mantle, and carried in his hand a lighted lantern.
Fra Giovanni accosted him and said:

'What is your name, Subtle Sir that slips through prison walls?'

And the knight made answer:

'Brother, what use to tell you the names folk give me? For you I will bear the one you shall call me by. Know this, I am come to you full of helpfulness and goodwill, and being informed you dearly love the Truth, I bring you a word touching this same Truth that you have taken for lady and companion.'

And Fra Giovanni began to tender thanks to his visitor. But the knight stopped him in the midst, saying:

'I warn you, this word of mine will seem to you at the first empty and of no account, for it is with it as with a tiny key, that the heedless man throws away without using.

'But the careful householder tries it in lock after lock, till he finds at last it opens a chest full of gold and precious stones.

'Wherefore I say to you, Fra Giovanni, seeing you ave chosen peradventure to take Truth for your Lady and darling, it behoves you greatly to know concerning her all that may be known. Well then, know that she is *white*. And from her appearance, which I will describe

you, you shall gather her nature, which will be very useful to you in making up to her and kissing her fair body with all sorts of pretty caresses, after the fashion of a lover fondling his mistress. Therefore take it as proven, brother mine, that she is *white*.'

After hearkening to these words, the holy man Giovanni answered:

'Subtle Sir, the meaning of your discourse is not so hard to guess as you would seem to fear. And my wit, albeit naturally thick and dull, was instantly transfixed by the fine point of your allegory. You say that Truth is white to manifest the perfect purity that is in her, and show clearly she is a lady of immaculate virtue. And truly I picture her to myself such as you describe, overpassing in whiteness the lilies of the garden and the snow that in winter clothes the summits of Monte Alverno.'

But the visitor shook his head and said:

'Nay! Fra Giovanni, that is not the meaning of my words, and you have in no wise broken the bone to extract the marrow. I instructed you that Truth is white, *not* that she is pure; and it shows little discernment to think that she is pure.'

Grieved at what he now heard, the holy man Giovanni replied:

'Even as the Moon, when the Earth hides the Sun's light from her, is darkened by the thick shadow of this World, where was wrought the crime of our mother Eve, so, most Subtle Sir, you have obscured a plain saying under baffling phrases. Thus we have you astray in the dark; for indeed Truth is pure, coming from God, the fountain of all purity.'

But the Opponent retorted:

'Fra Giovanni, your logic is at fault, or you would know that purity is an inconceivable quality. This is what the shepherds of Arcady did, so they say, who named pure gods the gods they knew not the nature of.'

Then the good Fra Giovanni sighed and said: 'Sir! your words are dark and wrapped in sadness. At times in my sleep angels have visited me. Their words I could not comprehend; but the mystery of *their* thought was full of joy.'

Hereupon the subtle visitor resumed:

'Come, Fra Giovanni, let us argue it out both of us according to the rules of syllogism.'

But the holy man answered:

'Nay! I cannot argue with you; I have neither wish nor wit for the task.'

'Well then!' returned the Subtle Sophist, 'I must needs find another Opponent.'

And in a moment, lifting the index finger of his left hand, he made with his right out of a corner of his gown a red cap for his finger. Then holding it up before his nose,

'Look!' he said, 'look at this finger. He's a learned Doctor now, and I am going to hold a learned argument with him. He's a Platonist, maybe Plato himself.

'Messer Plato, what is purity? I wait your answer, Messer Plato. Oh! you say. Consciousness is pure. Consciousness only when it is devoid of everything which may be seen, heard, handled, in one word proved by the senses. You grant me further,—yes! you nod your cap, that Truth will be pure Truth under the same conditions, that is to say provided only you make her dumb, blind, deaf, legless, paralytic, crippled of all her limbs. And I am quite ready to allow that in this state she will escape the delusions that make mock of mankind, and will have no temptations to play the runagate. You are a scoffer, and you have

made much mock at the world. Doff your cap.'

And the Opponent, dropping the corner of his gown, once more addressed the holy man Giovanni:

'My friend, these old Sophists knew not what Truth was. But I, who am a student of physics and a great observer of natural curiosities, you may believe me when I tell you she is white, or, more strictly speaking, whiteness itself.

'From which we must not conclude, I have told you before, that she is pure. Consider the Lady Eletta, of Verona, whose thighs were like milk; think you for this they were abstract from the world in general, withdrawn in the invisible and intangible, which is the pure, according to the Platonic doctrine? You would be much mistaken if you supposed so.'

'I do not know this Lady Eletta you speak of,' said the holy man Giovanni.

'She gave herself and her living body,' said the Opponent, 'to two Popes, sixty Cardinals, fourteen Princes, eighteen merchants, the Queen of Cyprus, three Turks, four Jews, the Lord Bishop of Arezzo's ape, a hermaphrodite, and the Devil. But we are wandering from

our subject, which is to discover the proper character of Truth.

'Now, if this character is not purity, as I have just established it cannot be in argument with Plato himself, it is conceivable it may be impurity, which impurity is the necessary condition of all existing things. For have we not just seen how the pure has neither life nor consciousness? And you must yourself, I trow, have learned amply from experience that life and all pertaining thereto is invariably compound, blended, diversified, liable to increase and decrease, unstable, soluble, corruptible—never pure.'

'Doctor,' replied Giovanni, 'your reasons are nothing worth, forasmuch as God, who is all pure, exists.'

But the Subtle Doctor retorted:

'If you would read your books more carefully, my son, you would see it is said of Him you have just named, *not*, "He exists," but, "He is." Now to exist and to be are not one and the same thing, but two opposite things. You are alive, and do you not say yourself, "I am nothing; I am as if I were not"? And you do not say, "I am he who is." Because to live,

is each moment to cease to be. Again you say, "I am full of impurities," forasmuch you are not a single thing, but a blending of things that stir and strive.'

'Now do you speak wisely,' answered the holy man, 'and I see by your discourse that you are very deep read, Subtle Sir, in the sciences, divine as well as human. For true indeed it is God is He who is.'

'By the body of Bacchus,' exclaimed the other, 'He is, and that perfectly and universally. Wherefore are we dispensed from seeking Him in any single place, being assured He is to be discovered neither more nor less in any one spot than in any other, and that you cannot find so much as a pair of old splatterdashes without their due share of Him.'

'Admirably put, and most true,' returned Giovanni. 'But it is right to add that He is more particularly in the sacred elements, by the way of transubstantiation.'

'More than that!' added the learned Doctor; 'He is actually edible in them. Note moreover, my son, that He is round in an apple, long-shaped in an aubergine, sharp in a knife and musical in a flute. He has all the quali-

ties of substances, and likewise all the properties of figures. He is acute and He is obtuse, because He is at one and the same time all possible triangles; His radii are at once equal and unequal, because He is both the circle and the ellipse—and He is the hyperbola besides, which is an indescribable figure.'

When the holy Giovanni was still pondering these sublime verities, he heard the Subtle Doctor suddenly burst out a-laughing. Then he asked him:

'Why do you laugh?'

'I am laughing,' replied the Doctor, 'to think how they have discovered in me certain oppositions and contradictions, and have reproached me bitterly for the same. It is very true I have many such. But they fail to see that, if I had them all, I should then be like the Other.'

The holy man asked him:

'What other is it you speak of?'

And the Adversary answered:

'If you knew of whom I speak, you would know who I am. And my wisest words you would be loath to listen to, for much ill has been said of me. But, if you remain ignorant

who I am, I can be of much use to you. I will teach you how intensely sensitive men are to the sounds that the lips utter, and how they let themselves be killed for the sake of words that are devoid of meaning. This we see with the Martyrs,—and in your own case, Giovanni, who look forward with joy to be strangled and then burned to the singing of the Seven Psalms, in the Great Square of Viterbo, for this word *Truth*, for which you could not by any possibility discover a reasonable interpretation.

'Verily you might ransack every hole and corner of your dim brain, and pick over all the spiders' webs and old iron that cumber your head, without ever lighting on a picklock to open this word and extract the meaning. But for me, my poor friend, you would get yourself hanged and your body burned for a word of one syllable which neither you nor your judges know the sense of, so that none could ever have discovered which to despise the most, hangmen or hanged.

'Know then that Truth, your well-beloved mistress, is made up of elements compacted of wet and dry, hard and soft, cold and hot, and that it is with this lady as with women of

common humanity, in whom soft flesh and warm blood are not diffused equally in all the body.'

Fra Giovanni doubted in his simplicity whether this discourse was altogether becoming. The Adversary read the holy man's thoughts, and reassured him, saying:

'Such is the learning we are taught at School. I am a Theologian, I!'

Then he got up, and added:

'I regret to leave you, friend; but I cannot tarry longer with you. For I have many contradictions to pose to many men. I can taste no rest day nor night; but I must be going ceaselessly from place to place, setting down my lantern now on the scholar's desk, now at the bed's head of the sick man who cannot sleep.'

So saying, he went away as he had come. And the holy man Giovanni asked himself: 'Why did this Doctor say, Truth was white, I wonder?' And lying in the straw he kept revolving this question in his head. His body shared the restlessness of his mind, and kept turning first one side then the other in search of the repose he could not find.

GIOVANNI'S DREAM

XIV

GIOVANNI'S DREAM

AND this is why, left alone in his dungeon, he prayed to the Lord, saying:

'O Lord! Thy lovingkindness is infinite toward me, and Thy favour manifest, seeing Thou hast so willed I should lie on a dunghill, like Job and Lazarus, whom Thou didst love so well. And Thou hast given me to know how filthy straw is a soft and sweet pillow to the just man. And Thou, dear Son of God, who didst descend into Hell, bless Thou the sleep of Thy servant where he lies in the gloomy prison-house. Forasmuch as men have robbed me of air and light, because I was steadfast to confess the truth, deign to enlighten me with the glory of the everlasting dayspring and feed me on the flames of Thy love, O living Truth, O Lord my God!'

Thus prayed the holy man Giovanni with his lips. But in his heart he remembered the

sayings of the Adversary. He was troubled to the bottom of his spirit, and in much trouble and anguish of mind he fell asleep.

And seeing the thought of the Adversary weighed heavy on his slumbers, his sleep was not like the little child's lying on its mother's breast, a gentle sleep of smiles and milk. And in his dreams he beheld a vast wheel that shone with colours of living fire.

It was like those rose windows of flower-like brilliancy that glow over the doors of churches, the masterpieces of Gothic craftsmen, and display in the translucent glass the history of the Virgin Mary and the glory of the Prophets. But the secret of these rose windows is unknown to the Tuscan artificer.

And this wheel was great and dazzling and brighter a thousandfold than the best wrought of all the rose windows that ever were divided by compass and painted with brush in the lands of the North. The Emperor Charlemagne saw not the like the day he was crowned.

The only man who ever beheld a wheel more splendid was the poet who, a lady leading him, entered clothed in flesh into Holy Paradise. The rose was of living light, and seemed alive

itself. Looking well at it, you saw it was made of a multitude of breathing figures, and that men of every age and every condition, in an eager crowd, formed the nave and spokes and felloe. They were clad each according to his estate, and it was easy to recognize Pope and Emperor, Kings and Queens, Bishops, Barons, Knights, ladies, esquires, clerks, burghers, merchants, attorneys, apothecaries, labourers, ruffians, Moors and Jews. Moreover, seeing all that live on this earth were shown on the wheel, Satyrs and Cyclopes were there, and Pygmies and Centaurs such as Africa nurses in her burning deserts, and the men Marco Polo the traveller found, who are born without heads and with a face below their navel.

And from betwixt the lips of each there issued a scroll, bearing a device. Now each device was of a hue which did not appear in any other, and in all the incalculable multitude of devices, no two could have been discovered of the same appearance. Some were dyed purple, others painted with the bright colours of the sky and sea, or the shining of the stars, yet others green as grass. Many were exceeding pale, many again exceeding dark and sombre, the whole

so ordered that the eye found in these devices every one of the colours that paint the universe. The holy man Giovanni began to decipher them, by this means making himself acquainted with the divers thoughts of divers men. And after reading on a good while, he perceived that these devices were as much diversified in the sense of the words as in the hues of the letters, and that the sentences differed one from the other in such sort that there was never a single one did not flatly contradict every other. But at the same time he noted that this contradiction which existed in the head and body of the maxims did not continue in their tail, but that they all agreed together very accurately in their lower extremity, all ending in the same fashion, seeing each and all terminated in these words, *Such is Truth.*

And he said in his heart:

'These mottoes are like the flowers young men and maidens pluck in the water-meadows by the Arno, to make them into posies. For these flowers are readily gathered together by the tails, while the heads keep separate and fight amongst themselves in hue and brilliancy. And it is the same with the opinions of human beings.'

And the holy man found in the devices a host of contradictions regarding the origin of sovereignty, the fountains of knowledge, pleasure and pain, things lawful and things unlawful. And he discovered likewise mighty difficulties in connection with the shape of the Earth and the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, by reason of the Heretics and Arabs and Jews, the monsters of the African deserts and the Epicureans, who all had their place, a scroll in their lips, on the wheel of fire.

And each sentence ended in this way, *Such is Truth*. And the holy man Giovanni marvelled to see so many truths all diversely coloured. He saw red, and blue, and green, and yellow, but he saw no white—not even the one the Pope made proclamation of, to wit, 'On this rock have I built my Church and committed thereto the crowns of all the world.' Indeed this device was all red and as if blood-stained. And the holy man sighed:

'Then I am never to find on the wheel of the universe the pure, white Truth, the immaculate and candid Truth, I would find.'

And he called upon Truth, crying with tears in his eyes:

'Truth! Truth! for whose sake I am to die, show yourself before your martyr's eyes.'

And lo! as he was wailing out the words, the living wheel began to revolve, and the devices, running one into the other, no longer kept distinct, while on the great disk came circles of every hue, circles wider and wider the further they were from the centre.

Then as the motion grew faster, these circles disappeared one by one; the widest vanished first, because the speed was swiftest near the felloe of the wheel. But directly the wheel began to spin so fast the eye could not see it move and it seemed to stand motionless, the smallest circles too disappeared, like the morning-star when the sun pales the hills of Assisi. Then at the last the wheel looked all white; and it overpassed in brilliance the translucent orb where the Florentine poet saw Beatrice in the dewdrop. It seemed as though an Angel, wiping the eternal pearl to cleanse it of all stains, had set it on the Earth, so like was the wheel to the Moon, when she shines high in the heavens lightly veiled under the gauze of filmy clouds. For at these times no shadow of a man carrying sticks, no mark at all, shows

on her opalescent surface. Even so never a stain was visible on the wheel of light.

And the holy man Giovanni heard a voice which said to him:

'Behold that same white Truth you were fain to contemplate. And know it is built up of the divers contradictory truths, in the same fashion as all colours go to make up white. The little children of Viterbo know this, for having spun their tops striped with many colours on the flags on the Great Market. But the Doctors of Bologna never guessed the reasons for this appearance. Now in every one of the devices was a portion of the Truth, and all together make up the true and veritable device.'

'Alas! and alas!' replied the holy man, 'how am I to read it? For my eyes are dazzled.'

And the voice answered:

'Very true, there is naught to be seen there but flashing fire. No Latin letters, nor Arabic, nor Greek, no cabalistic signs, can ever express this device; and no hand is there may trace it in characters of flame on palace walls.

'Friend, never set your heart on reading what is not written. Only know this, that whatso-

ever a man has thought or believed in his brief lifetime is a parcel of this infinite Truth; and that, even as much dirt and disorder enter into what we call the order of nature, that is the clean and proper ordering of the universe, so the maxims of knaves and fools, who make the mass of mankind, participate in some sort in that general and universal Truth—which is absolute, everlasting and divine. Which makes me sore afraid, by the by, it may very like not exist at all.'

And with a great burst of mocking laughter, the voice fell silent.

Then the holy man saw a long leg stretched out, in red hose, and inside the shoe the foot seemed cloven and like a goat's, only much larger. And it gave the wheel of light so shrewd a kick on the rim of its felloe, that sparks flew out as they do when the blacksmith smites the iron with his hammer, and the great wheel leapt into the air to fall far away, broken into fragments. Meantime the air was filled with such piercing laughter that the holy man awoke.

And in the livid gloom of the dungeon, he thought sadly:

'I have no hope or wish left to know Truth, if, as has just been manifested to me, she only shows herself in contradictions and inconsistencies. How shall I dare by my death to be witness and martyr of what men must believe, now the vision of the wheel of the universe has made me see how every particular falsehood is a parcel of general Truth, absolute and unknowable? Why, O my God, have you suffered me to behold these things, and let it be revealed to me before my last sleep, that Truth is everywhere and that she is nowhere?'

And the holy man laid his head in his hands and wept.

THE JUDGMENT

XV

THE JUDGMENT

FRA GIOVANNI was led before the Magistrates of the Republic to be judged according to the laws of Viterbo. And one of the Magistrates said to the guards:

'Take the chains off him. For every person accused should appear freely before us.'

And Giovanni thought:

'Why does the Judge pronounce words that are not straight?'

And the first of the Magistrates began to question the holy man, and said to him:

'Giovanni, bad man that you are, being thrown in prison by the august clemency of the laws, you have spoken against those laws. You have contrived with wicked men, chained in the same dungeon as yourself, a plot to overthrow the order stablished in this city.'

The holy man Giovanni made answer:

'Nay! I but spoke for Justice and Truth. If

the laws of the city are agreeable to Justice and Truth, I have not spoken against them. I have only spoken words of lovingkindness. I said:

'"Strive not to destroy force by force. Be peaceable in the midst of wars, to the end the spirit of God may rest on you like a little bird on the top of a poplar in the valley that is flooded by the torrent." I said, "Be gentle toward the men of violence."'

Then the Judge cried out in anger:

'Speak! tell us who are the men of violence.'

But the holy man said:

'You are for milking the cow that has given all her milk, and would learn of me more than I know.'

However the Judge imposed silence on the holy man, and he said:

'Your tongue has discharged the arrow of your discourse, and its shot was aimed at the Republic. Only it has lighted lower, and turned back upon yourself.'

And the holy man said:

'You judge me, not by my acts and my words, which are manifest, but by my motives, which are visible only to God's eye.'

And the Judge replied:

'Nay! if we could not see the invisible and were not gods upon earth, how would it be possible for us to judge folk? Do you not know a law has just been passed in Viterbo, which punishes even men's secret thoughts? For the police of cities is for ever being perfected, and the wise Ulpian, who held the rule and the square in the days of Cæsar, would be astonished himself, if he could see our rules and squares, improved as they are.'

And the Judge said again:

'Giovanni, you have been conspiring in your prison against the common weal.'

But the holy man denied having ever conspired against the weal of Viterbo. Then the Judge said:

'The gaoler has given testimony against you.'

And the holy man asked the Judge:

'What weight will my testimony have in one scale, when that of the gaoler is in the other?'

The Judge answered:

'Why! yours will kick the beam.'

Wherefore the holy man held his peace henceforth.

Then the Judge declared:

'Anon you were talking, and the words you said proved your perfidy. Now you say nothing, and your silence is the avowal of your crime. So you have confessed your guilt twice over.'

And the Magistrate they entitled the Accuser rose and said:

'The illustrious city of Viterbo speaks by my voice, and my voice shall be grave and calm, because it is the public voice. And you will think you are listening to a bronze statue speaking, for I make accusation not with my heart and bowels, but with the tables of bronze whereon the Law is inscribed.'

And straightway he began to gesticulate furiously and utter a raging torrent of words. And he declaimed the argument of a play, in imitation of Seneca the Tragedian; and this drama was filled full of crimes committed by the holy man Giovanni. And the Accuser represented in succession all the characters of the tragedy. He mimicked the groans of the victims and the voice of Giovanni, the better to strike awe into his audience, who seemed to hear and see Giovanni himself, intoxicated with hate and evildoing. And the Accuser

tore his hair and rent his gown and fell back exhausted on his august seat of office.

And the Judge who had questioned the accused before took up the word again and said:

'It is meet a citizen defend this man. For none, so says the law of Viterbo, may be condemned without having first been defended.'

Thereupon an Advocate of Viterbo got up on a stool and spoke in these terms.'

'If this monk has said and done what is laid to his charge, he is very wicked. But we have no proof that he has spoken and acted in the manner supposed. Moreover, good sirs, had we this proof, it would behove us to consider further the extreme simplicity of the man and the feebleness of his understanding. He was the laughing-stock of the children in the Public Square. He is ignorant; he has done a thousand extravagances. For my own part I believe he is beside himself. What he says is worthless nonsense, and there is nothing sensible he can do. I think he has been frequenting seditious societies; and goes about repeating what he heard there, without understanding a word of it. He is too dull-witted to be punished. Look out for his instructors; it is they are to

blame. There are many difficulties in the matter, and the wise man has told us, "In doubt, refrain from action."'

Having so said, the Advocate stepped down from his stool. And Brother Giovanni received his death sentence. And he was informed he was to be hanged in the Square where the peasant women come to sell fruit and vegetables and the children to play knucklebones.

Next a very illustrious Doctor of Law, who was one of the Judges, got up and said:

'Giovanni, it behoves you to subscribe consent to the sentence condemning you, for being pronounced in the name of the city, it is pronounced by yourself, inasmuch as you are part and parcel of the city. You have an honourable part in it, as citizen, and I will convince you that you ought to be well content to be strangled by the city's judgment.

'Know this, the satisfaction of the whole comprehends and embraces the satisfaction of the parts, and seeing you are a part—a vile and miserable part, yet still a part—of the noble city of Viterbo, your condemnation which satisfies the community should be no less satisfactory to yourself.

'And I will further prove you that you should rightly consider death doom agreeable and fitting. For there is no other thing so useful and becoming as is the law, which is the just measure of things, and you ought to be pleased to have received this same just and proper measure. In accordance with the rules stablished by Cæsar Justinian, you have got your due. Your condemnation is just, and therefore a pleasant and a good thing. But, were it unjust and tainted and contaminated with ignorance and iniquity (which God forbid), still it would be incumbent on you to approve the same.

'For an unjust sentence, when it is pronounced in the prescribed forms of law, participates in the virtue of the said forms and through them continues august, efficacious and of high merit. What it contains of wrong is temporary and of little consequence, and concerns only the particular instance, whereas the good in it derives from the fixity and permanence of the organization of the laws, and therefore is it agreeable to the general dictates of justice. Wherefore Papinian declares it is better to give false judgment than none at all, seeing how men

without justice are no better than wild beasts, in the woods, whereas by justice is made manifest their nobleness and dignity, as is seen by the example of the Judges of the Areopagus, who were held in special honour among the Athenians. So, seeing it is necessary and profitable to give judgment, and that it is not possible to do so without fault or mistake, it follows that mistake and faultiness are comprised in the excellence of Justice and participate in the same excellence. Accordingly, supposing you deemed your sentence unfair, you should find satisfaction in this unfairness, inasmuch as it is united and amalgamated with fairness, just as tin and copper are fused together to make bronze, which is a precious metal and employed for very noble purposes, in the fashion Pliny describes in his Histories.' The learned Doctor then proceeded to enumerate the conveniences and advantages which flow from expiation and wash away sin, as the maids every Saturday wash the courtyards of their masters' houses. And he demonstrated to the holy man what a boon it was for him to be condemned to death by the august good pleasure of the Commonwealth of Viterbo,

which had granted him judges and a defender. And so soon as the Doctor's eloquence was exhausted and he fell silent, Fra Giovanni was fettered once more and led back to prison.

THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD

XVI

THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD

NOW on the morning appointed for his hanging, the holy man Giovanni was lying sound asleep. And the Subtle Doctor came and opened the door of his prison cell, and pulling him by the sleeve, cried:

'Ho! there, son of woman, awake! The day is just unclosing his grey eyes. The lark is singing, and the morning mists kissing the mountain sides. Clouds glide along the hills, soft and sinuous, snow-white with rosy reflexions,—which are the flanks and bosoms and loins of immortal nymphs, divine daughters of the river and the sky, maidens of the morn old Oceanus leads forth along the heights—a flock multiform as his waves, and who welcome to their cool, fresh arms, on a couch of hyacinths and anemones, the gods, masters of the world, and the shepherd swains loved

of goddesses. For there are shepherds their mothers bore beautiful and worthy the bed of the nymphs that dwell in the water-springs and woodlands.

'And for myself, who have deeply studied the secrets of nature, seeing but now these clouds curling wantonly round the bosom of the hill, I was filled with mysterious longings at the sight, longings I know nothing of but that they spring from the region of my loins, and that, like the infant Hercules, they showed their strength from the very cradle. And these longings were not merely after rosy mists and floating clouds; they pictured very precisely a wench named Monna Libetta I made acquaintance with once in travelling, at Castro, at an inn where she was serving-maid and at the free disposal of the muleteers and soldiers frequenting it.

'But the picture I framed in my mind of Monna Libetta, this morning, as I fared along the slopes of the hills, was wondrously embellished by the tenderness of recollection and the regrets of separation, and she was tricked out with all the pretty fancies that, springing from the loins as I said, presently sent their fragrant fire coursing

through all the body's soul, transfusing it with languishing ardours and pains that are a delicious pleasure.

'For I would have you know, my Giovanni, that looking at her calmly and coldly, the girl was not greatly different from all the rest of the country wenches that, in the plains of Umbria and the Roman marches, go afield to milk the cattle. She had dark eyes, slow and sullen, a sunburnt face, a big mouth, the bosom heavy, the belly tanned and the forepart of the legs, from the knee, shaggy with hair. Her laugh was ready and rude, in a general way; but in act with a lover, her face grew dark and transfigured as if with wonder at the presence of a god. 'Twas this had attached me to her, and I have many a time pondered since on the nature of this attachment, for I am learned and curious to search out the reasons of things.

'And I discovered the force that drew me towards this girl Monna Libetta, maid-servant at the inn of Castro, was the same that governs the stars in heaven and that there is one force and one only in the world, which is Love. And it is likewise Hate, as shown by the case

of this same Monna Libetta, who was fiercely fondled, and just as fiercely beaten.

'And I mind me how a groom in the Pope's stables, who was her chief lover, struck her so savagely one night in the hay-loft where he was bedding with her, that he left her lying there for dead. And he rushed crying through the streets that the vampires had strangled the girl. These be subjects a man must needs ponder if he would gain some notion of true physics and natural philosophy.'

Thus spoke the Subtle Doctor. And the holy man Giovanni sitting up on his bedding of dung, answered:

'Nay! Doctor, is this language meet to address to a man that is to be hanged in a very short while? Hearing you, I am filled with doubt whether your words are the words of a good man and a great Theologian, or if they do not rather come from an evil dream sent by the Angel of Darkness.'

But the Subtle Doctor made answer:

'Who talks of being hanged? I tell you, Giovanni, I am come hither, at the earliest peep of day, to set you free and help you to fly. See! I have donned a gaoler's habit; the prison

door stands open. Quick! up and away!'
At this the holy man rose to his feet, and answered:

'Doctor, take heed what you are saying. I have made the sacrifice of my life, and I admit it has cost me dear to make it. If trusting to your word that I am restored to life, I am then led to the place of execution, I must needs make a second sacrifice more grievous than the first, and suffer two deaths instead of one. And I confess to you my desire of martyrdom is vanished away, and a longing come upon me to breathe the air of day under the branches of the mountain pines.'

The Subtle Doctor made reply:

'It happens that was just my intent to lead you away under the pines rustling in the wind with the soft sighing of a flute. We will break our fast sitting on the mossy slope overlooking the city. Come with me! Why do you tarry?'

And the holy man said:

'Before going hence with you, I would fain know clearly who you are. I am fallen from my first constancy; my courage is no better now than a straw blown about on the wasted threshing-floor of my virtue. But I am left

my faith in the Son of God, and to save my body, I would ill like to lose my soul.'

'Verily,' cried the Subtle Doctor, 'think you verily I have any desire of your soul? Is it then so fair a maid and sweet a lady you are afraid I may rob you of it? Nay! keep it, friend; I could make nothing of it.'

The holy man was scarce assured by what he heard, for the other's words breathed no pious odour. But, as he was exceeding eager to be free, he asked no more questions, but followed the Doctor and passed the wicket of the prison by his side.

Only when he was without, he inquired:

'Who are you, you who send dreams to men and set prisoners free? You have the beauty of a woman and the strength of a man, and I admire you, though I cannot love you.'

And the Subtle Doctor answered:

'You will love me so soon as I have made you suffer. Men cannot love but those who make them suffer; and there is no love except in pain.'

And so conversing, they left the city and began climbing the mountain paths. And after faring far, they saw at the entering in of a wood a

red-tiled house, before which was a wide terrace overlooking the plain, planted with fruit trees and bordered with vines.

So they sat down in the courtyard at the foot of a vine trunk; its leaves were gilded by the Autumn and from the boughs hung clusters of grapes. And a girl brought them milk and honey and cakes of maize.

Presently the Subtle Doctor, stretching out his arm, plucked a scarlet-cheeked apple, bit into it and gave it to the holy man. And Giovanni ate and drank; and his beard was all white with milk and his eyes laughed as he gazed up at the sky, which filled them with blue light and joy. And the girl smiled.

Then the Subtle Doctor said:

'Look at yonder child; she is far comelier than Monna Libetta.'

And the holy man, intoxicated with milk and honey, and made merry with the light of day, sang songs his mother was used to sing when she carried him as a babe in her arms. They were songs of shepherds and shepherdesses, and they spoke of love. And as the girl stood listening on the threshold of the door, the holy man left his seat and ran staggering towards

her, took her in his arms and showered on her cheeks kisses full of milk, laughter and joy.

And the Subtle Doctor having paid the reckoning, the two travellers hied them toward the plain.

As they were walking between the silvery willows that border the water, the holy man said:

'Let us sit; for now I am weary.'

So they sat down beneath a willow, and watched the water-flags curling their sword-like leaves on the river banks and the bright-coloured flies flashing over the surface. But Giovanni's laughter was ceased, and his face was sad.

And the Subtle Doctor asked him:

'Why are you so pensive?'

And Giovanni answered him:

'I have felt through you the sweet caress of living things, and I am troubled at heart. I have tasted the milk and the honey. I have looked on the servant-maid standing at the threshold and seen that she was comely. And disquietude is in my soul and in my flesh.

'What a long road I have travelled since I have known you. Do you remember the grove of holm-oaks where I saw you the first time? For be sure, I recognize you.

THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD

'You it was visited me in my hermit's cell and stood before me with woman's eyes sparkling through a transparent veil, while your alluring mouth instructed me in the entanglements of Right and Wrong. Again it was you appeared in the meadows clad in a golden cope, like an Ambrose or an Augustine. Then I knew not the curse of thought; but you set me thinking. You put pride like a coal of fire on my lips; and I learned to speculate. But as yet, in the untrained freshness of my wit and raw youthfulness of mind, I felt no doubt. But again you came to me, and gave me uncertainty to feed on and doubt to drink like wine. So comes it, that this day I taste through you the entrancing illusion of things, and that the soul of woods and streams, of sky and earth, and living shapes, penetrate my breast.

'And lo! I am a miserable man, because I have followed after you, Prince of men!'

And Giovanni gazed at his companion, who stood there beautiful as day and night. And he said to him:

'Through you it is I suffer, and I love you. I love you because you are my misery and my pride, my joy and my sorrow, the splendour

and the cruelty of things created, because you are desire and speculation, and because you have made me like unto yourself. For verily your promise in the Garden, in the dawn of this world's days, was not vain, and I have tasted the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, O Satan.'

Presently Giovanni resumed again.

'I know, I see, I feel, I will, I suffer. And I love you for all the ill you have done me. I love you, because you have undone me.'

And, leaning on the Archangel's shoulder, the man wept bitterly.

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